

## Speak Obliging/ Loving Communication

<b>Title</b>	<b><u>Communication</u></b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Good communication, expressed in a loving manner, is a key leadership skill and has applications in project management, team dynamics, youth challenges, and each and every module in this leadership program. Sathya Sai Baba has given guidance on what is good communication on many occasions. We will discuss these teachings and how to put them into practice daily. Practising His teachings on communication is especially essential for all those in leadership roles in the Sri Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSSIO).
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discuss ways to practise Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings on loving communication daily.</li> <li>▪ Practise skills required to communicate effectively and with love, including conflict resolution.</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate how to practise effective and loving communication via e-mail and other forms of electronic communication.</li> <li>▪ Share best practices in leading meetings in the SSSIO.</li> <li>▪ Describe the best ways to speak about Sathya Sai Baba and be able to handle requests to speak with the media about Sathya Sai Baba and the work of the SSSIO.</li> </ul>
<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	Active study circle
<b>Projected Dates</b>	13, 14, 15 January 2023, SSSIO WI

### 1. READING MATERIAL

<b>Pre-Reading</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Sathya Sai Newsletter USA</i>, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Summer 2013), on Communication. <a href="http://us.sathyasai.org/ssn/index.htm">http://us.sathyasai.org/ssn/index.htm</a></li> </ul>
<b>Post- Reading</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sathya Sai quotes on communication</li> </ul>

## 2. DELIVERY PLAN

CONTENT
Introduction
Understanding Is Key
Sathya Sai Baba's Teaching on Criticism and Filtering what we hear
E-mail Etiquette
A Positive "No": Speaking with Love
Speaking Respectfully and Handling Conflict
Leading Meetings
Communication with the Public
Summary and Skills Practice

## 3. INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION
<p>Have you ever been frustrated because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• you have a hard time understanding another person?</li><li>• another person has a hard time understanding you?</li><li>• someone gets upset from what you have just said, or have written in an e-mail?</li><li>• you apologise and make things worse?</li><li>• you try to help people by giving good advice, and they tell you that you have not really been listening or do not understand them?</li><li>• you have a hard time leading a meeting or conference call because someone keeps interrupting, changing the topic, or dominating the conversation?</li><li>• you are asked to explain what is the name of your "church group" (local or regional Sathya Sai group) or what organisation you belong to, and you do not know how to answer?</li><li>• communication at home, your work place, or with friends is not as good and loving as you would like?</li><li>• people do not seem to read or understand your e-mails?</li></ul> <p>If we answer <i>yes</i> to any of these questions, then Sathya Sai Baba's advice on loving communication will help us improve our communication, address all these problems, and make progress with our individual spiritual transformation.</p> <p>This SC builds on all the previous pre SC's and also forms a solid foundation for the upcoming SSSIO communications on Teamwork and Project Management. While differences exist in applying the principles of Teamwork and Project Management in a spiritual organisation (in this case the Sri Sathya Sai International Organisation) as opposed to the workplace and for-profit settings, the communication techniques that we focus on in this SC work equally well at home, at work, with friends, and in every single situation in which we need to communicate with others. This SC also covers how to speak about Sathya Sai Baba to the general public, with other community organisations, or to someone who does not know anything about Sathya Sai Baba.</p> <p>From the time we wake up in the morning until the time we go to sleep, Sathya Sai Baba's</p>

teachings on communication will help us to do the following:

***“Start the day with Love,  
Fill the day with love,  
Spend the day with love, and  
End the day with Love.”***

#### **4. MAIN BODY**

##### **MODULE**

The goal of this study circle is to improve our communication with family, friends, colleagues, co-workers, and everyone else we interact with throughout the day.

#### **Speak to God Himself**

The simplest and most powerful technique in this regard is to remember we are speaking to God or the divinity that resides in everyone, as we interact with others. This remembrance will ensure that all of our communication is filled with love, respect, patience, compassion, and humility. It also reminds us that we should always be thinking about God, and to recognise that God resides in our heart as our inner guide, is present in everyone we speak to, and is the basis of all creation, and then act accordingly.

Why are communication skills important? We each have a role to play in this life. The way we communicate with others determines how successful we are in this role and is also a good way to measure our spiritual progress.

#### **Actions: Our Most Powerful Communications**

The most powerful way we communicate who we are and what we stand for is through our actions. Actions speak louder than words! Our dearest Sathya Sai Baba is the best role model in this regard; he inspired and is inspiring people all over the world to serve those in need, by the loving example of the way he led his life. His message that everyone has a birthright to receive high-quality medical care, values-based education, and pure drinking water was communicated in the most powerful and beautiful way through:

- a) The hospitals he built, which provide the highest quality, free medical care with love and compassion;
- b) His educational institutions, which provide the highest quality education, free of cost, based on the five human values (truth, right action, love, peace, and nonviolence) and the two pillars of knowledge and compassion;
- c) His water projects, which have provided free, pure drinking water to more than 12 million people in India who had suffered for many years from lack of pure drinking water.

If we want our children, SSE students, or colleagues to behave in a certain way, we need to lead by example, because what we do is much more important than what we say.

#### **The Power of Our Words, Tone of Voice, and our Body Language**

The following words of wisdom show the power and longevity of our communications:

***“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said. People will forget what you did.***

***But people will never forget how you made them feel.*** —Dr. Maya Angelou

Sathya Sai Baba has said the same in different ways. We must be especially careful about what we say, since unkind words cause a wound that can fester in the heart of another for years: ***Practice moderation in speech – it will help you in many ways. When the foot slips, the wound heals after a few months; when the tongue slips, the wound it causes in the heart of another will fester for life.*** [SSS 1:10, 22-July-1958]

**Smile!** Smiling is a simple and powerful way to communicate with others and should be a cornerstone of our communication skills. At the 3rd World Youth Conference in July 2007, Sathya Sai Baba said, ***“When we smile, love bubbles up in us.”*** He has reminded doctors that they should greet each patient with a smile and give them the ***“capsule of love,”*** because this will speed the patients’ progress and help their healing.

This same greeting applies to all of us, regardless of our profession. Smiling is also a silent way to make a heart-to-heart connection with others, regardless of language, background or country of origin.

### **Silence / Moderation of Speech**

Silence or moderation of speech is also important. Sathya Sai Baba has said that before we speak, we should consider several things, which we can remember as ***“T.H.I.N.K.”***:

T – Is it true?

H – Will it hurt anyone?

I – Will it improve on silence?

N – Is it necessary?

K – Is it kind?

(See, e.g.,: radiosai.org, *Sai Inspires*, 12 June 2013)

Various scriptures have also taught:

- Speak the truth.
- Speak the truth in a pleasing way.
- Avoid speaking a truth that is hurtful.

***In order to solve many problems that arise when one practises the sadhana of Truth, Manu directed man not to speak out unpleasant truth or pleasant falsehood. When it becomes necessary to reveal an unpleasant truth, one has to soften and sweeten its impact by consciously charging it with Love, sympathy, and understanding. “Help ever; hurt never” -- that is the maxim.*** [SSS 18:26, 5-Dec-1985]

- And, in order to avoid speaking a truth that is hurtful, sometimes silence is golden.

***The Shaasthras also say, “Sathyam bruyaath, priyam bruyaath na bruyaath Sathyam apriyam”---“Speak the truth, but speak pleasantly. Simply because a statement will be welcome to the hearer, don't speak it out to win his approval; if speaking truth will cause grief or pain, keep silent.”*** [SSS 7.46: 20-Dec-1967]

Regarding moderation in speech, Sathya Sai Baba has said:

***The bond of love and brotherliness will be stronger if people would speak less and speak sweetly. Silence (mounam) has been prescribed as a spiritual practice for this same reason.***

***You are all aspirants at various stages on the road, so this discipline is valuable for you also.*** [SSS 1:10, 22-July-1958]

Sathya Sai Baba also shares about the tongue:

***The tongue is liable to commit four errors: (1) uttering falsehood, (2) finding fault with others, (3) excessive articulation, and (4) indulging in scandals. These have to be strictly avoided if there is to be peace for the individual and society.*** [SSS 1:10, 22-July-1958]

### **About Finding Faults – Look Inside!**

Regarding finding faults with others, Sathya Sai Baba has given a number of guidelines:

- (a) What we perceive is but a reflection of ourselves. There is a very good chance we have this same fault in us.
- (b) See the good in others and look for faults in ourselves.
- (c) Be lenient when judging others and harsh when judging our own actions.
- (d) Focusing on the faults of others can contaminate our minds, and the faults of others can even enter our mind.

If we do not have the role of a supervisor, where our job responsibility is to evaluate a person's actions, both "good" and "not good," then why are we judging others' actions?

The following is a beautiful quote from Sathya Sai Baba to reflect on whenever we catch ourselves seeing faults in others:

***The others are part of yourself. You need not worry about them. Worry about yourself; that is enough. When you become all right, they too will be all right, for you will no longer be aware of them as separate from you. Criticising others, finding fault with them, etc. – all this comes out of egoism. Search for your own faults instead. The faults you see in others are but reflections of your own personality traits. Pay no heed to little worries; attach your mind to the Lord. Then, you will be led on to the company of good people and your talents will be transmuted. Consider everyone as children of the Lord, as your own brothers and sisters; develop the quality of love, and seek always the welfare of humanity. Be like the bee, drinking the nectar of every flower, not like the mosquito, drinking blood and distributing disease in return. If you continue to love, you will be loved in return.*** [SSS 1:11, 25-July-1958]

### **"First Understanding, Then Adjustment"**

Sathya Sai Baba teaches us, ***First understanding, then adjustment.*** [Sharon Sandweiss, Nov 19, 2009, speech at Prasanthi\_Nilayam]

***Understanding others is the key to adjustment.*** [SSS 26:26, 21-July-1993]

***First you must understand each other. After that adjustment will be easy. First understanding. Second adjustment. Ninety percent of the people try adjustment first. This is the wrong way. First understanding.*** (Visions of Sai, Rita Bruce pg. 129]

Sathya Sai Baba has said that most of the time we do just the opposite! Before we listen to another person properly, to understand how they feel or what they want, we often cut that person off and start giving advice, before we have properly understood them.

I show a cartoon to depict something many of us do – a situation that occurs at meetings at the office, school, or even at Sathya Sai Centres in our study circles.



In this instance, someone is talking – and thinks the others are actually listening! Often, people who appear to be listening are not really paying attention to what the speaker is saying and instead are thinking about what they are going to say next and are only waiting for their chance to speak.

### **For Understanding, Build Listening Skills**

The first mistake we make is that we don't listen properly and interrupt others before they are finished saying what they want to say. When we do this, we are not practising the first part of

***"First understanding, then adjustment."***

Then, we make the further mistake of going right to the adjustment part and thinking this means giving the other person advice. Often the other person does not want or need advice but just wants to have someone listen. So, simply expressing empathy or giving the other person the capsule of love by listening, is all we need do. If we are not sure if advice is wanted, we can find out by asking, "Would you like advice on that, or can I help in some way?"

One way we can listen attentively is to put ourselves in the other person's shoes and listen the way we would like someone to listen to us. Or we can imagine that the person we are speaking to is someone we have tremendous respect for, such as a dear elder. For those who are devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, we can remind ourselves that we are listening and speaking to our dearest Sathya Sai Baba, who resides in the heart of each and every person. When we remember that God resides in the person we are speaking to, we will automatically listen with patience, humility, respect, reverence, and love.

### **Summarise to Improve Understanding**

**Repeat back:** A good method to make sure we have really understood the person we are listening to is to summarise or repeat back what the person has just said. This is very helpful when we want to be sure we have really understood the person's message and the reason for the communication.

**Avoid making assumptions:** It is best not to make too many assumptions about what the other person is thinking or what the other person wants, because when we make an assumption about another's motives or wants, we are often wrong. It is important to summarise what we

think the other person is saying or what the other person wants. Why? Because nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood!

**Inquire further:** After we have listened carefully to the other person, it is time for our response (the “*then adjustment*” part). Before going to the adjustment phase, we might need to ask further questions and again summarise what the speaker has said, to make sure we understood.

**Express empathy:** Often people just want “to be heard,” and when we express empathy, such as, “That sounds very difficult”; “I am sorry to hear that”; and so on – this alone may be all we need to do, which is another way of giving them the capsule of love.

**Have advice? Wait to be asked:** If someone asks for advice, we can give advice, and we should keep it short and simple. If we are not sure that the person wants advice, we can ask, “Would you like to hear what others have found helpful in this situation?” or, “I am sorry to hear that; can I help in some way?”

**Praise publicly, critique privately:** If we are a supervisor or it is our role to give people feedback, keep in mind the rule of thumb to praise and acknowledge in public and give feedback for improvement in private. Also, we must make sure we have built a relationship with someone before giving constructive criticism; otherwise, the person may not be open to receiving our suggestions for improvement.

### **Build a “Positive Account” in Relationships**

We can also keep in mind “building a positive bank account” in the area of relationships. The rule of thumb is to make several deposits (compliments or acknowledgments) before we make a withdrawal (give someone a suggestion for improvement).

Keep this in mind when offering criticism to family, friends, and co-workers. This method is certainly a good incentive to look for the good in others and to build a nice relationship with them over time, by praising their good work and acknowledging their good actions, whenever we get a chance to do so.

Certainly one must give feedback when it is our duty to do so (as a supervisor at work or other position where it is within our job description to perform job evaluations). Even so, we can remember the importance of developing a relationship beforehand, where we enter the feedback situation with a positive balance in our relationship account (many more praises and acknowledgments than criticisms).

### **Lead with positives:**

When giving feedback, one may start by pointing out a person’s positive points and then transition into areas where the person needs to improve.

**Avoid “BUT . . .”:** Another tip to remember is not to negate a compliment or positive point by saying *but*. If you tell a person something positive and then say “*but . . .*,” this may indicate to him or her that you didn’t really mean the initial compliment.

**Use “AND . . .”** Here is an example of how to give positive comments along with suggestions for improvement: “John, what I notice about you when you are at your best is \_\_\_\_\_, **and** . . . what I notice about you when you are not at your best is \_\_\_\_\_.

## Accepting Criticism

How about when people criticise us or point out areas where we need to improve? Sathya Sai Baba has told us that we should **listen carefully** when people are criticising us and **be open** to this criticism – because they may be right! If they are correct, then we must be grateful to the person pointing out our faults, and we must do our best to be humble and correct those faults. If, on the other hand, when we honestly evaluate and reflect on the criticism and realise it is not true, the correct response is to take it as a test from God.

### “Test Is Taste for God”

Sathya Sai Baba gives us a couple of examples. We have to pass a test before graduating from one grade to the next at school. Similarly, in the school of life, God gives us tests, which we must pass before graduating to the next grade. How we react to criticism about us, if it is not true, is one of these tests.

***Do not grieve that the Lord is testing you and putting you to the ordeal of undergoing the tests, for it is only when you are tested that you can assure yourself of success or become aware of your limitations. You can then concentrate on the subjects in which you are deficient and pay more intensive attention, so that you can pass in them too when you are tested again.***

[SSS 03.07: March 1963]

Another example Sathya Sai Baba gives is that when we hammer a nail into the wall to hang a picture or other item, we shake the nail and make sure it is firmly in the wall before placing the picture. In other words, how strong is our equanimity, our ability to forbear and hold fast to our practice of love during such a circumstance.

***Obstacles that come in the way are often treated with a certain amount of resentment by the pilgrims on the spiritual path; but these tests are to be treated as ensuring safety. You drive a nail into the wall to hang a picture thereon; but before hanging the picture, you try to see whether the nail has been well driven by shaking it; when you are certain it does not shake even when all your strength is used, you become bold enough to hang the picture on it. You must welcome tests because it gives you confidence and it ensures promotion.***

[SSS 6.23: 8-Sept-1966]

Similarly, when people criticise us (and the criticism not true), God is testing the firmness of our faith, patience, fortitude, and love for others. So, the next time we are criticised “unjustly,” remember:

(a) This is a test to graduate to the next class.

(b) God is testing the strength of His nail in the wall. God likes to test us. As Sathya Sai Baba says, ***Test is taste of God!***

***Never feel depressed when you are weighed down by difficulties. God will never impose on you ordeals that you cannot bear. He tests his devotees in various ways. Test is the taste of God. Never fear any test. Be ready to sacrifice even your life for the sake of God. Only then will God protect you.***

[SSS 31.45: 25-Dec1988]

***Welcome the test because thereafter you are awarded the certificate. It is to measure your***



***progress that tests are imposed. So do not flinch in the face of grief. The Lord bestows a favour when He decides to test you, for He is impressed by your achievement and wants to put upon it the seal of His approval. Rise up to the demands of the test — that is the way to please the Lord.*** [SSS 2.32: 6-Mar-1962]

***When obstacles come they should be taken as tests. Tests are intended not as punishment, but they are given for ascertaining one's fitness for promotion. Frequent tests mean frequent opportunities for promotion. If there is a big time-lag between tests, it only means that promotion is not possible for a long time. The obstacles in sadhana should be taken in this spirit, and you should try to overcome them.*** [SSS 18.15: 7-July-1985]

***One should not allow one's faith in God to be affected by the ups and downs of life. All troubles should be treated as tests and challenges to be faced with courage and faith.*** [SSS 19.11: 3-June-1986]

***Pleasure and pain go together. Pain is often the means by which God tests human beings. They should welcome such tests, because they serve to promote one's spiritual development. Students should welcome examinations because they are preliminary to promotions to a higher standard, devotees at the present day do not relish "tests". They forget that without overcoming tests they will remain where they are. Even students unfortunately are averse to examinations. This is foolish. Only through tests they can progress in life. You should welcome tests and difficulties.*** [SSS 30.21: 14-Sep-1997]

#### **Helping When Possible; Saying "No," Nicely**

Sathya Sai Baba also has said, ***You cannot always oblige, but you can always speak obligingly.***

***God has created man in His own image so that his conduct should be in consonance with His command. You should not cause harm to anyone, for God exists in all. Always speak with a smile on your lips. You cannot always oblige, but you can always speak obligingly.*** [SSS 32:09: 16-Oct-1999]

***I advise through another slogan also: "Even if you cannot oblige, you can at least speak obligingly." This means that you have to cleanse your speech of cynicism and satire and be ever sincere and sweet. You may differ from co-workers on methods and programmes, but this should not leave a scar on your heart. Office-bearers in this Organisation are leaders who bear the brunt themselves, guides who walk along the path they wish others to take. They shall not command or punish, they can only persuade and advise.*** [SSS 14.13: 22-Nov-1978]

Many of our mothers have taught us the same: "There is always a nice way to say no." When a person asks us for specific help, and we can do so, we should jump at the chance, for God may not give us this chance again. We cannot always, however, do what a person asks us to do. If this is the case, we can at least find out what they are trying to accomplish. We may be able to help in some way, even if it is not the exact way they had in mind.

When we have to say no, one nice way of doing so is: "I really wish I could do \_\_\_\_\_. Now, what I can do is \_\_\_\_\_," or something similar. This keeps your statements positive, rather than saying flatly, "I can't do that."

Also, we may have times when we are not sure whether to say yes or no to a request. At times like these, we may not have to say yes or no immediately. We can give a response that shows that we have heard the request and need time to think and consider all angles. We can say, respectfully, "Let me think about that and I will get back to you." Or, we can ask for more information and time to reflect on the request. It is often prudent to ponder the implications or consequences of various responses to the request.

### **Showing Respect**

Some people say the idea that "you cannot always oblige, but you can always speak obligingly" does not work in many business situations or in the "real world," but nothing could be further from the truth.

Speaking obligingly does not mean that we will be labelled a "yes person," or that people will walk all over us, or that we cannot hold our ground and be firm on an issue. Speaking obligingly is just a way to show respect for another person's viewpoint. It does not mean we have to agree with what the other person is saying. Sathya Sai Baba has likewise said that if we want people to respect us, we first have to show others respect. [Summer Showers 1974- 2:28, pp 181-182] This also holds true in family interactions. Speaking obligingly is one of many ways we can show respect when we are communicating with others.

***When you converse with others, you should do so with respect. You should not use harsh words. "If you cannot oblige, speak obligingly," is the golden rule you should follow. When you salute others, it goes to God. When you criticise or abuse another person, that also goes to God. You must discourage and control the emergence of bad qualities. When you are in a bad or an angry mood, keep silent. Do not exchange words, which cause the anger to multiply***  
[SSS 31.19: 26-April-1998]

### **Remember: "Yes, AND . . . "**

We touched on this before, when talking about ways to give criticism, but again, another powerful way to show respect at work, home, and in all situations is to avoid using "Yes, BUT . . ." when responding to another person who is stating a point of view, and, instead, use the positive connector, "Yes, AND . . ." This helps show respect for others' views, and, if our view is different, "Yes, AND . . ." will help the others keep an open mind and hear our viewpoint, since we have just respected their opinion. For example, after hearing someone state a viewpoint on some matter, if we find ourselves seeing things slightly or dramatically different, we could say, "Yes, that's a good point – and for this situation, my approach would be . . .," and then give our viewpoint.

To recap:

#### **"Yes, BUT . . .":**

- a) tends to negate a compliment or other comment given preceding the "but"
- b) may indicate disrespect and non-acceptance;
- c) sounds judgmental;
- d) tends to be exclusive;
- e) discourages brainstorming or an open exchange of ideas.

#### **"Yes, AND . . .":**

- a) does not negate a compliment or positive statement preceding the "and";
- b) shows respect and acceptance;

- c) is nonjudgmental;
- d) tends to be inclusive;
- e) encourages others to express an opinion during brainstorming sessions, and helps to bring out group wisdom.

## Handling Conflict

**Just listen:** When listening to someone who is angry or upset, sometimes just listening is all that is needed. We don't have to give advice or solve everyone's problem. Most people just want to be listened to when they are upset.

**Handling our "hot buttons":** What should we do when someone pushes our "hot button" and we become angry or upset?

- a) Get curious instead of furious (*"First understanding, then adjustment."*)
- b) Demonstrate empathy (*"Give the other person the capsule of love."*)
- c) Remember, this is God's test (*"Test is taste of God"*)

*"I want you to use your tongue only for your good and the good of others. If you speak harshly to another, he too talks loud and harsh; angry words cause more angry words. But, if you use soft and sweet words when another is angry towards you, he will calm down, he will be sorry that he used his tongue in this way."* [SSS, Vol 9, ch 9]

## When We Cannot Oblige

How do we handle conflict when the person with whom we are speaking wants something we cannot give, or asks for something we believe is not good for the situation? This is a chance to practise all of the above strategies:

- a) **Listen attentively and patiently.** ("First, understanding.")
- b) **Give the "capsule of love."** Demonstrate empathy every chance we get: "I am sorry to hear that." "That sounds like a very difficult problem." Give the other person the "capsule of love."
- c) **Summarise or repeat back** what you have heard the other person say. This helps most people to calm down, because they know we have actually listened carefully, and it also checks for our own understanding. If we did not understand their request, they can help clarify it for us.

d) **Validate their opinion:** This is very important. It does not mean we must agree with the other person or that we will do what they are asking for. It does **show respect for and acceptance of** their opinion and thinking. For example, "Mr. Smith, from what you have told me, I can see why you think that this plan is the best course of action."

**"AND . . ."** Now, be careful. Here is the bridge, where you will give your opinion, which is different. We don't want to negate everything we have built up so far by using a negative connector such as **"But . . ."**

When we say **"But . . ."**, it takes something away from all the positive connection we have built in steps (a)–(d). **So, be careful, and use a positive connector, such as "AND . . ."**: "Mr. Smith, from what you have told me, I can see why you think that this plan is the best course of action." (This shows we respect the person's opinion.) **"AND,** from my experience with this situation, I have found that this other plan works well, and here are the reasons: \_\_\_\_\_ . . ."

This helps others keep an open mind to our viewpoint, when it is different from their viewpoint. Further advice from Sathya Sai Baba regarding showing respect for the viewpoint of others:

***Always respect another's opinion and another's point of view. Do not start a quarrel at the***

*slightest difference of opinion. He may be right and you may be wrong. Ponder over his argument; he might have had the advantage of knowing more about the subject or you may be prejudiced either for or against; or he may not know as much as you. All differences of opinion are not due to personal hatred, remember.* [SSS 1.24: 25-Nov-1959]

*Never give scope for differences of opinion even in trivial matters. If any differences were to arise, each should be prepared to forgive the other. All are the children of God. All are brothers and sisters. You should understand this truth and conduct yourself accordingly. There is love in everyone. It is only when man develops love in him can all be united. When we develop love and give up hatred, our innate power will manifest.* [SSS 40.08: 20-Mar-2007]

### **The Art of Apologising**

How to make an apology: keep it short and simple . . . and don't make excuses!

How to make an apology when you are really in "hot water":

- a) I am sorry.
- b) My mistake.
- c) Please forgive me!

### **E-mail Communications**

**Just as we pause before speaking, and remember who we are speaking to, which is God; the same applies when we are reading or sending an e-mail. Remembering this will help with the following:**

E-mail is a good way to share ideas. **E-mail is not a good way to resolve differences.** In fact, most of the time when we try to resolve differences via e-mail, things get worse. When we disagree about something via e-mail, we should show restraint and not respond immediately. We should collect our thoughts and not send an e-mail that may hurt another person's feelings and make things worse. Instead, we should speak to the other party, in person if possible, or, if this is not possible, discuss the issue on Skype or on the phone. Speaking with the person face to face is best, and next best is speaking by Skype or on the phone. Doing this gives us a better chance to understand the other person's viewpoint and then work through our differences.

**Avoid negative comments.** Never say anything negative about a person via e-mail. When we criticise another person it amounts to criticising God. In the first place, if we want to point out someone's shortcomings, it is best to speak with the other person directly rather than criticise them behind their back using e-mail. Also, whatever negative thing we may say about another person, may end up circulating around the world via e-mail to many people. Also it has happened many times that the person you are criticising may be copied accidentally on your e-mail and receive your behind-the-back criticism. If this happens, it could be very hurtful to them.

**Use subject line to summarise email content.** The subject line should clearly explain the content of the e-mail and should make the other person want to open up and read the e-mail. And don't forget to put something in the subject line – surprisingly, some people forget to do this. Having a well-thought-out subject line is very important for another reason. Down the road, you or others may want to come back to this e-mail. If the subject line describes the content well, it will be easier to find, when you or others do a search to find the important information in this e-mail.

**Keep E-mails short and to the point.** Listing a few bullet points will make it easier for others to read. Thoughtful and well-written e-mails take some time to compose. This time is well invested, so that others don't waste their time reading a diffuse and confusing e-mail. Mark Twain once wrote a long confusing letter to a friend. At the end of the letter he wrote, "I apologise for the long letter; if I'd had more time, it would have been shorter and to the point!" E-mail should also have all the needed information for others. If you are sharing details about an event, it is best to list the name of the event, date, location, time, and all other necessary information, including links to register or get directions.

**Include all the information.** Please don't say something like, "For directions or registering, kindly refer to the previous e-mail from a week ago." We should make it easy for those reading our e-mail to get all the information they need, nicely summarised in this e-mail.

**CCs.** Who should we send the e-mail to? Everyone who needs to know – *and no one else*. Saying something negative about another person is bad enough and should be avoided; even worse is sending this type of e-mail to many people who should not have been copied on the e-mail.

**Fwds.** When forwarding e-mails, again, send to everyone who should know – and no one else. Also, do explain your reason for forwarding the e-mail, in the subject line if possible.

**Keep the subject line current.** A group of people may start discussing topic A in a chain of e-mails, and a few days later the topic has changed to topic B. Many times, the subject line stays the same, and this becomes confusing to those who receive it. Also it makes the details discussed on the new topic difficult to locate later. When the topic or content of an e-mail changes, the subject line should also change to reflect what is being discussed currently, or start a new e-mail chain under the new topic, including all the pertinent discussion that has taken place.

**Respond to all emails promptly,** and also express gratitude to the person sending the email if they have accomplished some task, or have responded to a request with needed information, or they have tried to help in some way.

### **Additional E-mail Etiquette**

E-mail etiquette involves many fine points of loving discrimination and courtesy. Here are a few more points to bear in mind when e-mailing:

- **Don't share official Sathya Sai organisation e-mail lists.** Some people will be tempted to use e-mail lists for commercial purposes or other ways that are not proper. We may do this inadvertently if we don't pay attention to the next bullet point.
  - **Use BCCs.** Blind copy group lists of e-mail addresses, to prevent sharing of people's e-mail addresses without their permission (and, be transparent about who is receiving the e-mail). This keeps e-mail addresses private and at the same time helps prevent inadvertent problems down the road, such as someone hacking into a person's address book and then sending out spam, a virus, or worse.
  - **No negative BCCs.** Do not send an e-mail to a colleague saying something negative, or pointing out a mistake the person has just made, and then blind copy the person's superior or as many other people you can think of, to make sure they all know (behind-the-back style) about the mistake your colleague just made.
  - **Be Careful with "Reply All".** Be careful about hitting "Reply All" or sending to an entire e-mail list. In most cases, this is to be avoided, because you may be sending spam inadvertently to your entire group. On the other hand, when communicating with others on a committee or
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other small groups, hitting "Reply All" is appropriate when people are inviting and sharing ideas.

- **Use only one e-mail address (not several such as from Hotmail, Yahoo, and Gmail)** When available, use SSIO email address, as noted in following bullet point.
- **Use your official title and use appropriate formality when sending official SSIO e-mails.** For example: presidencia.nal@sathya sai.org.mx or vice.president@manhattan saicenter.org
- **Do Not Use ALL CAPITAL LETTERS!** This gives others the impression that we are shouting at them.
- **Attachments.** If we say, "See attached document or see attached JPEG pictures" – we should double check to make sure we have attached these documents before sending our email.
- **Be Careful with Copying and Pasting.** In most cases this not a good idea since the material we copy and paste may be out of date, have incorrect information, or not be relevant at the time we are sending.

## **How to Lead a Meeting**

### **Before the Meeting**

1. Decide on the agenda with input from the group.
2. Schedule the meeting well in advance.
3. Check to avoid conflicts with other Sai meetings.
4. Include supporting material if indicated.
5. In the heading for the e-mail reminder, list the date, location, and time.
6. Plan any meals or refreshments in advance with help from the group.
7. Arrange for all other logistics, such as necessary equipment, and make sure it is in good working condition (projector, laptop, enough and the correct connectors, mics and speakers if needed, flip charts, markers, etc.)
8. Designate someone to record the meeting with notes and/or recording device if appropriate.
9. First reminder 1–2 months in advance and consider final reminders one week before and on day of meeting.

### **During the Meeting**

1. Start with 3 *Oms* or any way to focus our attention on God and ask for divine guidance for the meeting.
2. Review the agenda of the meeting.
3. A group icebreaker may be helpful in certain circumstances to start the meeting.
4. Keep discussions on point.
5. Encourage every member to participate, and give everyone a chance to lead at least one meeting over time (two people can also co-lead).
6. If a decision on any point is needed, start the discussion process early and provide background or support materials prior to the meeting.
7. Summarise each decision to check on group agreement.
8. Any action plan should be summarised at end, with: a) what needs to be done; b) who is responsible for doing each action; and c) when does each action need to be completed.
9. Discuss an agenda for the next meeting if appropriate.
10. Start and end all meetings on time.
11. Vary the programme with small group and large group discussions and games.

12. If appropriate, for example, in meetings that are 4–8 hours long, consider providing for a meeting evaluation at the end to gather feedback on: a) the most helpful parts of the meeting; and b) areas that could be improved for future meetings.
13. End the meeting by thanking all for their participation, followed by *Om* and 3 *Shantis* or any other way to express gratitude to God for guiding the meeting and bringing it to a peaceful and productive end.

### **After the Meeting**

1. As soon as practical, send minutes or a brief summary of the meeting to all participants and also to any members of the group who could not attend.
2. Send also any key documents discussed at the meeting, which may be the summary or actual PowerPoint presentation given during the meeting.
3. Monitor the progress of action items to help everyone keep on schedule.

**Meeting Challenges:** In group meetings, certain dynamics may occur that work against the productivity of the group and the equality of contribution among the participants. Some of these challenges include:

1. Meeting dominators
2. Silent participants
3. Technical difficulties with sound, projection, conference call-in number not working, needed supplies not being present, food delivery, etc.

The job of those facilitating the meeting includes keeping the discussion moving, and making sure all are invited to provide input. It also involves starting and concluding the meeting on time. To attenuate the influence of meeting “dominators,” thank them for their contribution and move the discussion on by asking for other’s opinions. To bring out “silent” participants, gently encourage their participation by asking for their opinion on different points. Also, asking specific questions and staying on point helps to keep a meeting moving along.

If the discussion wanders off-topic, one can suggest taking up that topic in a smaller group or different meeting or phone conference, and returning to the main topic.

Regarding possible interruptions caused by technical difficulties and logistical mishaps, pre-planning a checklist of supplies and necessities is helpful. If conference call hosting service is down or not working properly, having a alternative conference call host service and call in number is prudent planning. Arriving early to check the AV equipment, conference call service, or webinar service is also helpful. And, remember, it’s always good to have a Plan B, “just in case.”

### **Speaking about Sathya Sai Baba**

- **For Friends, Colleagues, and Small groups:** best to speak about His teachings, life, and the service projects He has inspired. It is also good to speak about how practicing His universal teachings have helped with one’s own personal improvement. For example, “I have become a better person by knowing Him and practicing His teachings of “Love All, Serve All, and Help Ever, Hurt Never”, or any other teaching that has inspired us.

People can relate to how Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings have changed our lives for the better,

and will be inspired learning about His universal teachings, and the service projects He has inspired people to do around the world to help those in need.

- **For public meetings or speaking to the media:** Ask, “Am I the right person?” If the answer is NO, refer inquiries to the Public Relations representative for the SSIO in your region, country, or zone.

By following this protocol, we will make sure that the Sathya Sai spokesperson talks to the media, such as radio and TV stations, and also the right people arrange and coordinate public meetings.

## 5. SUMMARY

### SUMMARY

This study circle covered many important teachings on communication. The most important teaching is to bear in mind always that we are speaking to God or the divinity that resides in everyone, as we interact with others. This remembrance will ensure that all of our communication is saturated with love and will also mean that we can enjoy each and every interaction because we now have a chance to speak with, interact with, and spend each and every moment with God. What could be better than that?

The following points summarise other important teachings on communication that can help us all become better leaders and also help us progress in our own spiritual transformation.

#### 18 Pearls of Loving Communication

1. Always remember to whom we are speaking, which is God or the divinity residing in everyone. When we remember this, we are much more likely to implement all the rest of the pearls of communication.
2. Actions speak louder than words.
3. First understanding, then adjustment.
4. When someone shares something painful, just listening and demonstrating empathy (giving them the capsule of love) is frequently all that is needed.
5. Before giving advice, ask to see if that is what the other person wants. Frequently saying something like, “I am so sorry to hear that,” is all that is needed. When we ask if we can help in some way, most of the time the other person is likely to respond, “No thanks; I feel better now . . . thanks for listening.”
6. We cannot always oblige, but we can always speak obligingly.
7. If we are not sure whether to say yes or no to a request, we can give responses that will give us time to think and consider all angles.
8. It’s good to apologise when we are late or have not done something right, and we should keep it short and sweet and not make excuses.
9. For serious mistakes: “I am sorry; my mistake; please forgive me.”
10. When someone tells us his or her opinion and it is quite different from ours, remember to act with acceptance of a different point of view and to not feel offended.
11. When experiencing a major difference of opinion and we need to resolve a conflict, by virtue of our organisational role or otherwise, consider the following steps:
  - a.) Listen patiently: “First understanding, then adjustment.”



- b.) At every opportunity, demonstrate empathy: “That sounds difficult/painful. “ “I am sorry to hear that.”
  - c.) Summarise periodically what others are saying. This lets them know we are listening carefully and helps to make sure we properly understand their viewpoint. First we need to understand their viewpoint, before we can work on or suggest any adjustment or resolution to a conflict.
  - d.) Validate others’ viewpoints: “Based on what you have told me, I can see why you think this plan is the best solution.” This does not indicate we agree; it only shows we now understand and respect their opinion.
  - e.) Now be careful! Watch out for your *bridge* language. Don’t undo all the good you have done in steps (a)–(d) by using a negative connector such as *BUT*: “Based on what you have told me, I can see why you think this plan is the best solution” (first giving validation – and then, connecting or bridging the conversation to your point of view:) “*AND*, based on my experience, I believe another plan is good to consider for the following reasons \_\_\_\_\_” Or, say, “The good thing is, we both have the same goal, which is \_\_\_\_\_”. Focussing on unity and common goals helps a negotiation succeed.
12. E-mail communication has some specific nuances, but almost everything we have discussed so far applies also to e-mail communications.
  13. First, *never* try to resolve conflict or a significant difference of opinion via e-mail. Instead, attempt to speak with the person face-to-face or on the phone. Trying to resolve conflict via e-mail almost always results in making things worse. Second, never say anything negative about someone via e-mail. E-mail is a permanent record, and even more important, Sathya Sai Baba has advised us to *Help Ever*, and *Hurt Never*. Never cause hurt by an unkind word, in person or via e-mail, which could fester in someone’s heart for years.
  14. Avoid criticising others; when we catch ourselves doing so, we must reflect and see if we have *this fault* ourselves. *Frequently* when we see a fault in others, it is because we ourselves have this fault.
  15. Test is taste of God. When others criticise us, it is also our duty to reflect to see if they are correct. If they are right, we can be grateful and work on our own self-improvement. If the criticism is not valid, we can remember that God likes to test us, and we will pass only when we retain our equanimity and inner peace.
  16. If you feel something you say in person, on the phone, or by e-mail runs the risk of hurting another – remember, sometimes silence is golden.
  17. Responding to questions about Sathya Sai Baba:
    - a.) Best to answer from your own personal experience.
    - b.) First find out what or how much the person would like to know.
    - c.) When asked to speak about Sathya Sai Baba to friends, colleagues, and co-workers; focus on Sathya Sai Baba’s life and His message or teachings. We can also speak about His many service projects and the work He has inspired worldwide. We can also talk about how we have become a better person by using Him as our role model.
    - d.) If asked to speak about Sathya Sai Baba for a large public meeting, an article in the newspaper or on TV, it is best to check with the designated person who is responsible for this task in our region.
  18. Leading meetings:
    - a.) Before the meeting: Decide on agendas with input from the group. Schedule well in advance and make sure the meeting does not conflict with other Sai events.
    - b.) During the meeting: Start by focusing everyone’s attention on God. Chanting *Om* three times and praying for God’s guidance throughout the meeting is one way.

Designate or ask for a volunteer to record meeting notes. Encourage everyone to participate, and remember, group wisdom is always available. Stick to the agenda; start on time and finish on time. If a decision on any point is needed, bring this up early in meeting. Technical difficulties may arise. Good preplanning for AV equipment, sound, conference call, and webinar services will help avoid most technical difficulties.

To bring out “silent” participants, gently encourage their participation by asking for their opinion on different points. Thank meeting “dominators” for their contribution and move discussion on by asking for the opinions of others. Also, asking specific questions and staying on point helps to keep a meeting moving along.

- c.) After the meeting: Send minutes to everyone, share important documents discussed and monitor progress on action items.

***“Speak softly, sweetly, without malice in your heart; speak as if you are addressing the Sai who resides in everyone”*** [SSS 5.15: 3-Mar-1965]

***“It is essential to keep the tongue under control. The manner in which the tongue is employed determines one’s fame or ignominy. The tongue determines your friendship and relationships”*** [SSS 28.05: 28-Feb-1995]

***“Never use foul words against another. Such words should not rise from your tongue, nor should they enter the ear of the others. Remember that there is God inside your heart, as well as in the hearts of all the rest. He hears and sees all things”*** [SSS 09.09: 16-May-1969]

***“So when you use harsh, cruel, angry and foul words against another, the God in you and the God in the other person is hurt. The tongue is a tool, as I said. You can harm yourself and harm others with it. So, be very careful; use it only for your good and for the good of others. If you use it for talking kind words, for repeating the Name of God or singing His Glory, or praying to Him – then, it is put to the best use.”*** [SSS 09.09: 16-May-1969]

***“One who calls himself a leader should always speak sweetly and lovingly. He should not indulge in criticism. Criticism is nothing but the reflection, reaction and resound of one’s wicked qualities. The bad qualities that one sees in others are nothing but the reflection of one’s own inner feelings. No one has the right to find fault in others. He is the worst sinner who indulges in fault-finding. The tongue is given to make others happy and to sing the glories of the Lord. You cannot always oblige, but you can speak always obligingly”.*** [SSS 33.14: 10-Sep-2000]